Depot Town Rag

August 1989

Train Wreck responses
ESL caboosters
ARTRAIN's 5th
Discovered or
Malled to Death?
New Directory

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

ARTRAIN's 5th visit to Ypsilanti's Depot Town
1971 - 1981 - 1986 - 1987 - 1989

Five ARTRAIN stops over a span of eighteen years have seen a big change in Ypsilanti. The first stop only hinted at the excitement that could be made to happen in the old railroad district. By the time the ARTRAIN returned in 1981, Ypsilanti had found a new pride in its older neighborhoods and the parks along the Huron River found hundreds of thousands of folks turning out to celebrate the community's rich history. Many credit the regular visits of the ARTRAIN with helping to maintain the high spirit and excellent quality of the presentations at the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

ARTRAIN's 1989 exhibition presents over 300 of the finest objects from the Lawrence Scipps Wilkinson Collection of Toys. An affiliate of the Detroit Historical Museum, the Wilkinson Collection is one of the most distinguished of its kind in the nation. The exhibition will tour the Midwest through November.

Watch for an accompanying mini-toy show in Depot Town shop windows this month.

1989 Artrain theme for the Ypsilanti Heritage Festival:

Treasures of Childhood - 150 Years of American Toys

20 toymakers' exhibits at trackside from Cross Street to the Freight House
Model railroad • Radio-controlled cars • Farmers' Market
Street exhibitions • Farm Toys • Doll show • Bottle Show
Many Depot Town shop windows will feature antique toys during August

Heritage Festival events

Friday, Saturday & Sunday, August 18, 19, 20th

- DTA's beer tent in Riverside park with the Artie Shaw Orchestra, B.J. Thomas, and others.
- Depot Town Antique Engine Club's 4th annual Early Engine Expo on Rice Street
- Michigan ARTRAIN at the crossing, surrounded by toymakers' booths
- On Cross Street: Antique Bottles, Doll Show
- In the Market Plaza: Antique Farm tractors
- At the Freighthouse: Radio-controlled cars, model trains, Farmers' Market

. . . and much more in Riverside Park and Frog Island. Saturday's spectacular Parade ends at the top of the hill, this year, to leave room for the events above!

New directory is out

Six years ago the Depot Town merchants published 10,000 copies of a beige-and-brown directory that unfolded into a map of the district and businesses listed according to the kind of product or service offered. Only a few remain, and they are hopelessly out of date.

This spring, the block's antique and food establishments put together another, slicker brochure aimed especially at the trade at the new Radisosn Resort. It was so well recieved that a third publication is now in the works to replace the general directory and be distributed to all advertisers, the Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor Convention Bureaus and other tourist-oriented centers in southeastern Michigan.

July activity saw thirty of the forty businesses in Depot Town agree to sponsor another, slicker printing featuring their business locations in the old railroad district. Watch for it in shops, on the tourist racks and at both the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Bureaus' locations.

At last, the story is found out!

50 Years Ago:
The Great Train Wreck!

Was it really all that great? Probably not, suggest those who were here in 1939

Photo: Ypsilanti Historical Museum archives.

Ypsilanti's famous Water Tower and Starkweather Chapel are each one hundred years old this year, along with that other famous tower in Paris. The Johnstown flood occurred that same year. The Ford Mustang is twenty-five years old so it seems that somewhere in between 1889 and 1964 we seem to have lost an appreciation for great events and respect for meaningful public places and events. Down in 'historic' Depot Town, we tend to seek out events of great import to which we **(continued on page 7)**

(continued from page one)

1939's Great Train Wreck

remembered by many

fasten our local history. Train wrecks help us to make a focus on certain points in time and we will probably have to settle for such folklore until some really big good or bad news comes to our little corner of the world.

When towns like Ypsilanti create Historic Districts, some folks think that means some history-making event must have happened there. Just being old is not enough for them. George Washington must have slept there, or something. Natural calamities are good enough bad news to make lasting impressions and they are often remembered and embellished upon over the years until they become much more calamitous than in their original form.

Depot Town's Great Train Wreck may fall into just such a category. When the real facts of that event are known, we may have to repeal the GTW capitalization and settle for 'the great train wreck' or the 'train wreck' or 'the wreck.' Since none of the stories about Our Wreck have been set to song (a la the Edmund Fitzgerald), we have long harbored a sinking feeling (!) that Our Wreck may have been embellished a bit too far.

In May's *Depot Town Rag*, we sent out the call for memories of the wreck that was purported to have done all that damage to the depot, the signal tower and the commercial bay next to the Sidetrack. Our readers have responded enthusiastically and their testimony set the record at least a little straighter than recent street talk.

Both Jack Miller and Jim Monaghan claim the wreck of '39 set their mothers into early labor, owing to the fact that Jim was born on August 21st and Jack saw the first light of day, appropriately enough, on *Labor* Day of that year. Although Phoebe Miller may very well have been on the scene while visiting her husband's auto dealership, Jim's mom was living in Chelsea at the time and probably only read about Ypsilanti's mishap in the newspaper. One might doubt the veracity of either account.

Folks over at the Senior Center were especially responsive to *The Rag's* call for facts. Mary Harberts recalls the event clearly, since her brother, Leslie Alexander, worked in the signal tower at the time. He passed away three years ago, after a long career with the railroad office in Dearborn and then retired from the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company. Mostly, Mary remembers that it was a favorite story of his -- but the details are long forgotten.

Nearly a decade ago *The Rag* ran an article about a woman who lived in one of the apartments on Cross Street during the 1939 accident. She related how she and her husband didn't notice the shock of the wreck and only observed the after-effects while the clean-up efforts were taking place outside their dining room window during breakfast the next morning. Could that have been the catastrophic event that wrecked nearly half the town? Her statement set today's locals wondering about the effects of that wreck in the neighborhood.

Joann Geer called in to say that her late husband, Worden (Wordy), had a video tape of the accident's aftermath. After explaining that the original was made on 8 mm film when he was first building the funeral home at Washington and Cross Streets in 1939 and he later transferred the film to the new TV technology, your editors made a copy of the copy and actually saw the steam coming from the wreck! Now, *that's* almost as good as being there! It appears, from the film, that a whole steam freight train turned over on its right side while east-bound between the Forest Avenue crossing and the end of the Freighthouse. Most of the rubble lay along the tracks next to what is the Frog Island parking lot today. Older locals may be able to identify other oglers in the crowd as another freight passes by on the other set of tracks headed for Detroit. We've passed the film on to the Historical Museum for safe keeping.

Then Mr. Kenneth Camp appeared with a chronology of facts to tell much more of the popular local story. In fact, in his version, it's more than one story. Mr. Camp is of that well-known family which inhabited these Depot Town spaces for many years. His uncle, Cye Camp, owned and operated Camp Publishing Company (in the space where The Depot Exchange is today) from 1926 to 1950. His father, Arthur Camp, operated Camp Photo, which was related to the publishing business for many years. (This was one of the first composite school photography enterprises in America. Most of those ancient photos hanging above the hallway lockers in the old high schools in the country were the product of Camp Photo. And his brother, Rowland, after developing pictures of World War II events in Alaska, joined the firm in 1945.) Kenneth Camp was out of town in August 1939 but, upon his return to the district later that month, his family filled him in on the events.

When we quizzed this local nearly-savant source about The Great Train Wreck, his version will surprise many story-tellers on the block. In the following paragraphs, Kenneth Camp relates the events of <u>three</u> different train wrecks at the Ypsilanti depot:

1926 - Eastbound train jumps tracks and demolishes the three-cornered Candy Store building next to the beer garden (Sidetrack). This, the first railroad accident recorded in Ypsilanti, occurred before business hours one morning sometime between October and December of that year.

Autumn, 1939 - Westbound train leaves the tracks at the switch stand and demolishes parts of the main passenger depot. The present baggage house at the end of the building closest to Cross and River Streets was modified and added after this wreck. Kenneth Camp was a fourteen-year-old then, and was visiting in Caro at the time. Upon his return to the family homestead in August, the recent train wreck was still the talk of the town.

August 23, 1943 - Westbound train leaves the tracks at the switch stand and hits express office, but missed the signal tower.

Did any of the above wrecks hit the signal towers? Mr. Camp doesn't think so. He suggests that they were remodeled over the years and removed with the advent of electric switching devices. The fact that Mary Heberts' brohter, Leslie Alexander, survived the 1939 wreck while in the signal house and lived a long and fruitful life thereafter, seems to bear this out. The concrete foundation of the most recent tower is still in place at the northwest corner of Cross, River and the RR crossing.

Today's newshounds will likely be watching for the *next* Great Train Wreck at the depot in 1989, but like today's plane crashes and wars, it will probably rate high enough on the Richter Scale to be remembered more accurately for a longer period of time. Just count the tank cars in the next consist and ponder their contents.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: We offer great thanks to the many readers in the community who so graciously responded with their stories, memories, photos and other artifacts of Depot Town's dubious moment(s) in history.)

Continuing next month -

More excerpts from Colburn's

"The Story of Ypsilanti"

1860-1869 :

Follett Hall, Highland Cemetery, Civil War, the Thompson Block, Woodruff School.

Historical perspective from good old Depot Town

Are we getting malled, or what?

After seeing the slick 4-color cover of the Ann Arbor Newz' DISCOVER magazine (Gallup Park, UM Stadium, UM Botanical Gardens and DEPOT TOWN!) local wags marveled at the table of contents of this 152-page publication: Entertainment & Culture, Housing, Shopping and other amenities so dear to the hearts of Depot Towners and probably everyone else.

The slicker's contents page even leads off with a photo of Ypsi's famous Water Tower while the Cross Street Bridge and Follett House are paired with the UM Burton Memorial Tower on page 7. The Water Tower appears in an even larger format on page 16 and, after UM Law Library and Nickels Arcade shots, maps and ads representing Our Town proliferate in a fashion so democratic, even today's Chinese nationals would be envious. The Charles Reinhart Co. Realtors' ad shows a drawing which could easily pass for our old commercial blocks.

Ypsilanti City Planner, Andrea Brown, was interviewed re: our 8 neighborhoods and she described Depot Town thusly: "... city living above charming historic commercial buildings," and the piece goes on to say, "This small neighborhood is located east of the Huron River and north of Photo. Home prices range from $40,000 to $80,000. Antique shops, restaurants and the Farmers Market give this area an old-fashioned ambiance."

Locals are thrilled at such recognition of our community values, but the theme and design of most of the rest of our community as proferred in this instance causes well-deserved alarm.

Some cases in point:

SHOPPING: There's no street intersection in front of the recent Krogers/Perry Drug Mall on Washtenaw, but a traffic light was installed. Now another one appears in front of the Huckleberry/Builders Square parking lot. It used to be that traffic lights marked intersections of public streets, but not any more. Today they guide the traffic to the mall.

Here's an evolution of that policy: Earlier, original structures, such as banks, were built in the old front-door-in-the-front tradition but they had to knock down all the buildings in the block behind them for parking. Customers complained about having to walk around the building, and no one wanted to come in the back door, so drive-in windows were installed. Eventually, the buiding was demolished and a new one erected in the former parking lot. Now the parking is in front.

HOUSING: New mall-condo-housing projects seem priced for University presidents, commercial sports stars, infamous rock musicians and Lee Ioccoca. They also seem to be built in an architectural style resembling Heritage French Country Colonial Regency Farms, but the continuous facades are obliterated by the gaping maw of 3- to 4-car garages. The models boast provincial-country furniture in mauve, and the neighbors cannot see each other, except at the too-air-conditioned mini-club house meetings where they gather to protest the monthly maintenance fees.

TRANSPORTATION: General Motors may have been on to something back in the Fifties when they built their monotonous rows of International Style design studios along Mound Road in Warren, MI. They were at least sensitive enough to dig the parking lots low enough into the landscaping plan so the view of their own auto-products would not pollute the aesthetic vista.

Meanwhile, auto strip malls proliferate while people and architecture stand at the periphery, vying for a place in the sun not too far from the cash registers. But while the air is filled with flourocarbons, a few silly old fashioned folks still plant trees and flowers along the street and park out in the back.

DISCOVER's kind and thoughtful recognition of this ancient ethic is a hopeful indication that Depot Town's attitude and operation may just survive, after all. We doubt that we'll take over the world, but we're sure to continue in this corny, but humane, operation just as long as there's someone in our society who is not afraid to show their corny humanity, as well. Maybe we're onto something, too.

The song may say, "Everybody's coming back, down between the River and the Railroad Track," but the developers' bull-dozers can be heard in the corn fields of Canton Township. They're coming, too!

Ike's Depot Barbershop
40 East Cross

Let's eat out in Depot Town!

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485-MEAN 17 E. Cross St.
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Old Town Restaurant
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
38 East Cross Street

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Aubree's Saloon & Second Floor
39 East Cross Street

Red Rooster Pizza
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37 East Cross • 483-4555

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• Air-brushed T-shirts
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10 % off any air-brushed T-shirt - or
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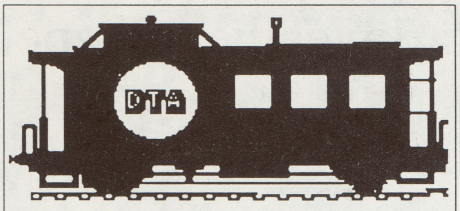
with this coupon



New or renewing DTA members this month:

D.T.A. 15 June 1989

Guests: New neighbors Ed Orlowski and Virginia.

Minutes: May minutes will be reviewed @ July meeting following publication.

Treasury: 841.94 General Fund
71.21 Merchants
272.34 Antique Engine Club

The Hartford Insurance Co's **audit** of the 1988 Frog Island Festival is ongoing. Preliminary figures indicate that DTA may receive an insurance refund.

Budget/Events:

The **Heritage Festival Jazz Competition,** traditionally co-sponsored by the DTA will not operate this year due to a redefining of 'risk factors' by the Heritage Festival Policy Committee. Jazz will remain a part of the Heritage Festival in the form of a tent in Riverside Park shared with country music. DTA will operate the abeer tent.

The **4th of July** will find many people parading through Depot Town. Frog Island will host an antique vehicle show and Riverside Park will host picnickers with the installation of supplemental picnic tables.

The DTA voted unanimously to provide the cash prizes (total $7.00) for boys' and girls' parading bicycles.

N.I.F.T.Y:

Jerry Meadows presented a **slide show** featuring Depot Town as a destination for tourist groups and emphasized the need for a cooperative effort with area businesses to create a successful promotions plan.

On a related note, the Ypsilanti Visitors & Convention Bureau (VCB) hosted the **Ann Arbor VCB on a tour** through Depot Town featuring introductions to area business people and their specialities. The group also toured Ypsilanti's extensive Historic District. The AAVCB was so impressed they've suggested featuring Depot Town as a destination for area hotels and conference centers. They will provide bus tours to the area if Depot Town can provide "step-on" tour guides.

DTA moved to begin work on a **new brochure** for distribution to tourist offices, hotels, restaurants, etc., thanks to the tireless efforts of Rag editor, Tom Dodd. The brochure will feature sponsoring area businesses. A mock-up and figures relative to pricing, quantities, and productions will be available at the July DTA meeting.

Caboose: A distinctive rental for a bargain price. $25. per event with a $10 key deposit. Contact Gary McKeever @ 483-4245.

Engineering Society: Contact the engineers with any job undone. Kids willing to work. Via The Old Caboose mail **slot.**

2nd Vice Presidents: no reports.

Other business:

The **August DTA meeting** has been rescheduled to August 3rd, @7:30 p.m. in The Old Caboose due to a conflict w/ the Heritage Festival kick-off party.

Roland Sizemore really hustled again and organized the perfect finishing touch to new Freighthouse loading dock. Please note the commemorative benches donated from area businesses.

Look for a **feature article** in the Chicago Sun-Times on travelling down the Old Chicago Road and, of course, stopping in Ypsilanti.

Forty-two neighborhood groups were represented @ the **Neighborhood Associations of Michigan conference** in Grand Rapids, June 2 & 3, and Depot Town was among them. Tom Dodd, along with other attendees, will share what he learned at an area "All Neighborhood Group" meetings, Tuesday, June 20th, @7:30 p.m. in the Ypsilanti City Council Chambers. Subjects to be addressed will include:

- Neighborhood Builders Alliance
- Knowing Your Neighborhood
- Effective Street Fighting
- the formation of a coalition for shared problems, issues, and EFFECTIVENESS.

The DTA agreed to purchase the book, **"Nonprofit Management Manual"** as a circulating reference for the Association.

Carrol Osborn has offered his expertise and direction in determining the materials and labor needed to save the old **plaza farm wagon** from demolition by the City.

Best Yet Award: Mary Kerr and the Ypsilanti Visitors and Convention Bureau for the great events and promotions.

Golden Goose Award: The City of Ypsilanti for 8 years of vacillation and indecisiveness over, under, and on Cross Street's north alley.

YPSI DIXIT

"In a small town like this, if you don't know what you're doing, somebody else does!"

August 1989

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Foundation
8 p.m. Thursday, 8/3
in The Old Caboose

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8/10
Freighthouse Coffee Shop

Merchants
5:15 p.m. Thursday, 8/17
at the Old Town Restaurant

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8/3 (earlier!)
in The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday 8/24
in the Freighthouse Coffee Shop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Jacob Guter, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Active Memberships :
- Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce
- Washtenaw Council for the Arts
- Neighborhood Associations of Michigan

NOTICE: The September issue of
The Depot Town Rag
will be circulated August 20th just to let folks know there*is* life after Festival!

PRINTING
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Hansen's
STANDARD PRINTING
-483-0339-

Another 100-year anniversary to celebrate: Highland's Starkweather Chapel

Depot Town Rag:

On page 4 of the May issue of the Depot Town Rag, you mentioned the 100th anniversaries of the Eiffel Tower and the Ypsilanti Water Tower. Are you aware that another local landmark is celebrating 100 years in 1989, too? I'm referring to the Starkweather Memorial Chapel at Highland Cemetery.

The chapel, dedicated to the memory of John Starkweather by his wife Mary was accepted by the Highland Cemetery Association on November 18th, 1889. It was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style by the Detroit architectural firm of Mason and Rice, who used sturdy sandstone and random-courses ashlar to form the structure.

While the exterior has weathered the years well, the interior has suffered. Temperature fluctuations have caused the woodwork (including wooden steps leading to the chapel tower), stained-glass windows, and plaster to deteriorate -- jeopardizing the utility of the chapel and placing it at risk.

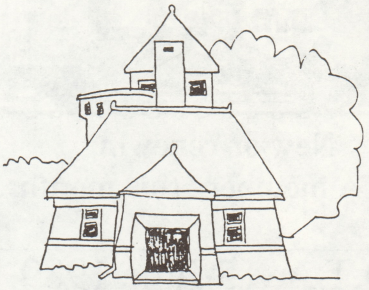
As you probably know, the cemetery is adminisitered by a board of trustees. Unfortunately, they've got their hands full keeping up with maintenance of a very large and aging burial ground. They can't really afford the estimated $25,000 it would take to bring Starkweather Chapel back to its original state.

Raising money for this restoration project is one of two reasons why our group, the Friends of Highland Cemetery, was formed. The other reason, or purpose, was to make he public aware of the natural, historical, and archictectural aspects of the cemetery grounds. . .

The Friends are anxious to be represented in your engaging and entertaining publication.

Thank you for your time and attention.

- Sincerely, Pat Majher, Publicity Chairperson, Friends of Highland Cemetery



Ypsilanti's Farmers' Market
in historic Depot Town
The Freshest Produce Around!
Wednesdays & Saturdays, 7 am - 3 pm

"Thank your for letting us see your caboose. We had a great time."

- From Matthew. I am 6 years old. I am from Poland.
- From Siti. I am 8 years old. I am from Malaysia.
- From Shung. I am 7 years old. I am from Kurdistan.

To the editor:

The ESL (English Second Language) teachers and students from the Estabrook summer school program would like to express our appreciation to the merchants of the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market, the staff at The Old Town Restaurant and the members of The Depot Town Association.

Thanks to your hospitality, our field trip was a great success. We enjoyed talking with the farmers, eating delicious doughnuts and breadsticks, exploring the Depot Town Caboose and ice cream at The Old Town.

For some of us, this was our first time at the market. We enjoyed it so much that we plan to bring our friends and relatives regularly. This field trip provided us with a most beneficial, hands-on, learning experience.

We look forward to keeping this an annual field trip.

Thanks from all of us: The ESL summer school staff and students, Estabrook Elementary School.

at the Farmers' Market
Messina's Cheese
483-1480

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Whole Natural Food in Bulk or Small Quantities
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Sat. 9-7; Sun. 12-5
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483-1520

Please send me stuff about Depot Town:

___ DTA membership information
___ Advertising in the monthly RAG
___ I want to help, assist, volunteer, etc. in the on-going work of the district.
___ Foundation
___ Merchants' Committee
___ Antique Engine Club
___ Engineering Society for kids
___ Caboose rental

Clip and send SASE to:
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The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

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Sat 10 am - 5 pm
Evenings by appt.

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So much of our heritage can be found in Depot Town!

August 18, 19, 20

Ypsilanti Heritage Festival

Over 350,000 people expected!

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&

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483-3637

City Body

20 East Cross Street

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307 North River • 483-1238

City Radiator

100 North River 483-2248

Hon's Flowers & Fancies

46 East Cross
482-2124